

# Identifying Your Skills

by Linda Marling Church



It is a common belief that hard skills earn the interview and soft skills earn the job.

Many Americans today are looking for a job, and that means there is a lot of competition. We've all heard stories about 100 people showing up for one opening at a local business; of employers getting so many inquiries about job openings that they hesitate to answer the phone; and of the millions of people who are near or at the end of their unemployment benefits. If you are looking for a job, now, more than ever, it is important to know and be able to sell your skills. Job applicants are notorious for not knowing, not valuing and not being able to succinctly list and talk about their skills.

What is a skill? A skill is something you can do now, such as operate a multi-line phone system or resolve a conflict. We learn skills from school, working, and living day-to-day.

Skills can be broken into two types: hard skills and soft skills. Hard skills are tangible, specific, and usually teachable: typing 50 words per minute or changing tires. Hard skills embody the technical or administrative knowledge required by employers to support their business activities. Soft skills (commonly known as, but not limited to "people skills") are intangible, difficult to measure and are often personal attributes: good communication skills or team-builder are commonly listed on resumes. Soft skills are learned throughout life, beginning with our parents and family who teach us how to be polite, to get up on time and to do those things we would rather not do. We learn by trial and error how to deal interpersonally with other human beings.

Most jobs require both hard and soft, and an integration of the two can lead to a well-rounded employee. We can learn the hard skill of word processing and be retrained in it if the software changes. Changing a soft skill is very

difficult; it takes a lot of hard work to unlearn a personality trait. Employers often complain that employees have the technical skills to do a job but lack the soft skill of responsibility, such as calling in when absent from work, showing up on time, or cooperating with co-workers.

To identify the skills that you bring to a company and its open position, list every job you have ever held, every hobby or club you've been affiliated with, every class, and every volunteer position. Beside each of these, list every hard skill you gained from that experience. If the job at the ice cream store taught you to listen to customers and fill their order accurately, that is a skill. If you worked for a landscaping company and can name plants that thrive in shade, that is a skill.

Next, list personality traits you believe you exhibited when you were engaged in those activities. Do you get along well with others; are you a team player or builder or good at details? Take credit for every positive trait you bring with you. Be brave and take a look at the not-so-positives, also. What would it take to turn them into positives?

To get a competitive edge, and maybe get the job, you need to sell your skills. And, to do that you need to be able to verbally express how they have served you in the workplace and how they were a benefit to previous employers. For instance, if you helped two co-workers solve a conflict, practice relating, in brief story form, how you did it. What soft skills did you call upon to help put the problem behind them so they could continue their work assignments? Once you have the story and feel confident about telling it, you'll be prepared to answer interview questions about your skills. Saying you have team-building skills on a resume is the basis for many an interview question.

A resource for more information on skills is a book by Peggy Klaus called The Hard Truth About Soft Skills.

Also go to online.[onetcenter.org/skills](http://onetcenter.org/skills) where you can check off the skills you have (and maybe be reminded of some you didn't list) and you'll be given a list of occupations that use those skills, complete with job growth and wage information. It is fun and enlightening to see what occupations pop up. And when you know and value your skills, it's fun to see what jobs pop up! ☺

## Soft Skills

- Adaptable
- Motivate co-workers
- Good listener
- Team player
- Dependable
- Conscientious
- Punctual
- Analytical
- Organized
- Honest
- Energetic
- Artistic
- Enterprising
- Outgoing
- Productive
- Responsible

## Hard Skills

- Operate a forklift
- Program a computer
- Read a GPS
- Build furniture
- Install a dishwasher
- Paint
- Order merchandise
- Count money
- Write a manual
- Set-up equipment
- Drive a vehicle
- Perform surgery
- Teach a language
- File documents
- Plant a tree